

DETERMINATION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERY FAILURES  
AFFECTING THE STATE OF FLORIDA

In September 1998 and in November 1998, the State of Florida was impacted directly by Hurricane Georges and Hurricane Mitch, respectively. Both storms caused significant damage and destroyed commercial traps used in the commercial spiny lobster and stone crab fisheries. These impacts directly affected commercial fishing in the waters off the State of Florida. The Governor of the State of Florida contacted the Secretary of Commerce, seeking a determination of a commercial fishery failure and the authorization of financial assistance.

Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1861(a)), authorizes the Secretary of Commerce at his discretion or at the request of a Governor to determine whether there is a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster as a result of:

- (A) natural causes;
- (B) man-made causes beyond the control of fishery managers to mitigate through conservation and management measures; or
- (C) undetermined causes.

Finding of a fishery resource disaster

The following information was provided to the Secretary by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as the basis for a determination of a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster. Approximately 190,000 traps were lost due to Hurricanes Georges and Mitch. This loss was uninsurable and financially affected fishermen directly in replacement costs, estimated at \$4.75 million. Fishermen were also indirectly affected by lost fishing effort. This has been estimated as \$375,000 for the spiny lobster fishery and \$700,000 for the stone crab fishery. The total for direct and indirect impacts is estimated to exceed \$5.8 million. Most of the economic impact was incurred over a very short period of time, which exacerbated

its severity.

Based on the foregoing information, I find that a fishery resource disaster occurred that significantly reduced the ability of fishermen to harvest spiny lobster and stone crab, thereby directly and adversely affecting their livelihoods.

#### Cause of the fishery resource disaster

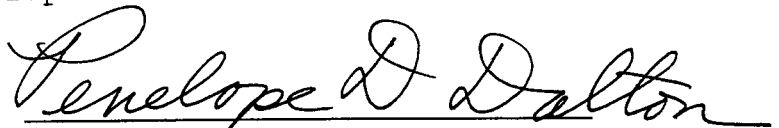
The fishery resource disaster was due to Hurricanes Georges and Mitch, which are natural causes.

#### Extent of the commercial fishery failure

The commercial fishery failure occurred as the result of severe losses in several fisheries from the effects of Hurricanes Georges and Mitch. The losses include 190,000 traps worth an estimated \$4.75 million and economic losses due to lost fishing time estimated at \$1.1 million. The total loss of \$5.8 million in commercial fishery revenues constitutes a commercial fishery failure.

#### Determination

Based on this information, under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, I have determined that the State of Florida suffered a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster as a result of natural causes. If funds are made available to assist the State of Florida, expenditures must be consistent with the State's plan of gradual trap reduction in both fisheries.



Penelope D. Dalton  
Assistant Administrator  
for Fisheries

SEP 20 1999

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Date